

VISUAL ARTS

CHARLES DESMARAIS *Art*

Sampler of Bay Area galleries' best

From comic to the sublime in Oakland, San Francisco

Just how many art galleries are there in the Bay Area?

That's not an easy question to answer. There are commercial spaces that have served their communities for half a century, and pop-ups in basements and living rooms that exist for only months or weeks.

I keep a list of what I think are the most credible art exhibition venues in the region — the ones I try to visit regularly. It now numbers 122 establishments. Open Space, an excellent online publication of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, is less subjective; you can see its map of 290 visual art spaces at <http://bit.ly/2fvuI2H>.

So, with the fall season of exhibition openings upon us, it can be a challenge to decide where to focus. I've been making the rounds of art galleries to help readers decide. Here is a second installment of my observations (Part I is available online at <http://bit.ly/2xtBYWm>):

Oakland treasures: Oakland has a lively visual arts scene, though it can be difficult to follow, with some spaces open only three or four scheduled hours each week. It's hard to make it as an art dealer under the best of circumstances; running a commercial gallery off the beaten art paths of San Francisco proper adds a level of difficulty.

The loveliest art exhibition space in all the Bay Area is the second floor of **Vessel Gallery** (www.vessel-gallery.com) at 471 25th St., a relic of the craft industries of an earlier century. With its stark-white raked wood ceilings, timeworn wooden floors, and French doors flung open on warm days to a deck garden, it's a place worthy of a feature in a popular shelter magazine. Vessel's program, however, tends to the colorful and the playful, with jewelry as a sideline — works that appeal, perhaps, to those with decor needs but that are not sufficiently tough-minded to add excitement to the comfort of a visit.

Consistent in its effort to test assumptions and complacency is the gallery **Johansson Projects** (<http://johanssonprojects.com>), 2300 Telegraph Ave. Known for its work to bring regional artists to a national

platform, the gallery is showing the work of **Claire Colette**, who earned a master's degree from Mills College in 2013, through Oct. 28.

An artist with a recent MFA from one of the top graduate

programs in the Bay Area might be expected to mount a trendy show, or an academic one, or both. Not this time. "Monument Eternal," as the exhibition is titled, reaches across time and theory to a

place more authentic.

Colette's art is genuine, but not original: The spiritual in art is not something one makes up, but that one seeks. If it exists, it is apart from the artist, and her task is less one of creation than of interpretation.

One of the best things about these meticulously laid out paintings — complex patterns and shifts of tone, some no deeper than a lambent shimmer, some darkly absorbing the light around them — is their paradoxical disregard for fussiness. They are crafted to the extent that they make a point of respect for something beyond imagery; yet an occasional stray brushstroke or

uneven application of paint is a matter of little concern.

These are abstract paintings with little connection to the formalist mainstream, represented by, say, Frank Stella or Ellsworth Kelly, to name two artists familiar to Bay Area readers from recent museum displays. Better to look at Colette's quirky, fascinating objects alongside the esoteric works of Transcendental Painters Group artists of the Southwest like Agnes Pelton and Raymond Jonson, or the brilliant, untrained Southern California minimalist John McLaughlin, who took his cues from Japanese philosophy.

A few doors away from Johansson is **Chandra Cerrito Contemporary**, 480 23rd St. (www.chandracerittocontemporary.com). One might almost think the exhibition there through Sept. 28, Santa Fe artist **August Muth's** "Tactile Radiance," was planned as a complement.

Muth makes layered holograms, sealed in laminated glass, tainted by a mechanical sheen of the sort Colette avoids. But they are glowing abstractions so technically proficient, so convincingly three-dimensional that it is hard to suppress the urge to reach toward the transcendent Light.

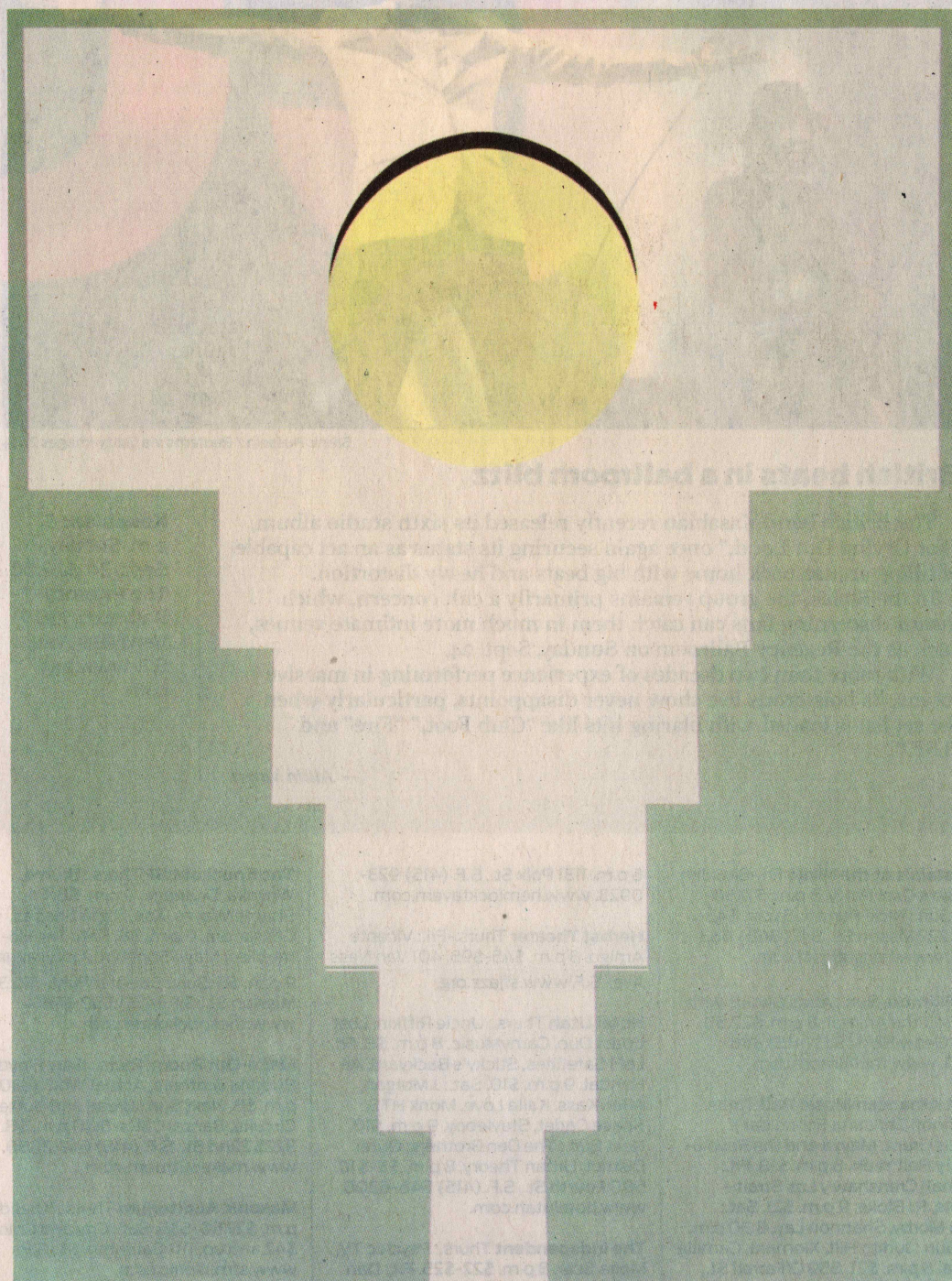
Classic artists, new works:

The venerable print studio **Crown Point Press** (20 Hawthorne St., S.F. <https://crownpoint.com>) shows new works by a pair of venerated artists through Oct. 31.

Wayne Thiebaud, who will turn 97 later this year, embraces his inner fool (and the buffoon in us all) with a new set of six intimate etchings he calls "Clown Memories" (2017). They are part of the small but impeccable exhibition "Wayne Thiebaud — Merriment."

"**Tom Marioni** at 80" also presents six new prints in the context of earlier work. True to Marioni's working method, they rely on conceptual effort rather than handwork to convey a maximum of visual information. An extension of his signature work "The Act of Drinking Beer With Friends Is the Highest Form of Art" (1970) and the later "Beer Drinking Sonata" (1996), "Beer with Musical Friends" (2017) references the careful paintings of Giorgio Morandi, but was made by simply tracing beer bottles onto the plate.

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Johansson Projects

Above: "Adityas" (2017) by Claire Colette, is in a show at Johansson Projects in Oakland. At left: At Crown Point Press in S.F.: "Beer With Musical Friends" (2017), by Tom Marioni.



Crown Point Press